

## Full of Fire by CosmicLeo

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Angst with a Happy Ending, Billy Hargrove Redemption, Billy starts out as a bit of a dick, Canon-Typical Violence, Character Study, Eventual Happy Ending, Harringrove, Homophobic Language, Implied/Referenced Child Abuse, M/M, Other Additional Tags to Be Added, eventually

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Billy Hargrove, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Neil Hargrove, Steve Harrington, Susan Hargrove

**Relationships:** (Past) Billy Hargrove/Original Male Character, Billy Hargrove & Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington

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**Summary:**

Billy was no stranger to the burn.

The burn of alcohol sliding down his throat, the burn of a bruise blooming on his ribs, his face, the burn of his knuckles against a wall, the burn of the weights he lifted, the burn of lips against his skin the burn of a cigarette, of hot engines on cool nights.

He knew what fire was, had always been surrounded by heat.

It seemed to burn brighter in Hawkins. He didn't want to think too hard about why.

# Full of Fire

## Author's Note:

My first ever fanfiction! I'm still getting used to AO3, so I'm sorry if the formatting is all over the place.

I don't really know what this is; a sort of character study with plot? I think?

I've had a lot of thoughts about Billy Hargrove for the past 2 years and I really had to get them out – it turned out a bit more poetically driven than I thought it would.

A Billy-focused Harringrove fic, which will feature events from the show. I've edited the ages a little – Susan and Max enter the family when they're a little older (when Billy is 16, and Max is 12).

Billy always had fire inside his veins.

Passion, for the sea, for the sands of California, for sunshine and surfboards, for the smile of a mother. It was warm, and it flowed through him like sand through fingertips.

And then it all turned to shit.

She left without saying goodbye. Somewhere between Billy curling up under sheets to muffle the shouts bleeding through the walls and him falling asleep, she'd swept out of his life. He'd woken up to silence, and arrived in the kitchen to see shards of glass and china strewn around, Neil sitting at the table reading the paper as if Billy's world hadn't just imploded.

'Where's Mom?' Billy wished he could steady his voice, but the trembling of *some things wrongs some things wrong* was thrumming throughout his body.

Neil grunted, and looked hard into Billy's eyes.

‘She’s gone. Get ready for school.’

‘Where did she go?’

‘She’s *gone* Billy.’ The paper had lowered to the tabletop and Neil slowly rose from the chair. ‘Get ready for school.’

Billy clenched his fists. The panic was burning in his throat, and he couldn’t swallow it down.

‘I want to know where Mom is.’

Neil stood abruptly, marching over to the door in two seconds flat and yanked Billy’s arm, squeezing tightly. Billy yelped as he was dragged forward, his bare feet skimming the glass covered ground.

‘I don’t like repeating myself Billy,’ Neil’s voice was dangerously quiet. ‘And I don’t think you’re showing your old man enough respect.’

Billy pulled the glass out of his heels in the bathroom in silence, hot tears rolling down his cheeks as he batted them away on a blood spotted towel. He helped his Dad to clear the broken glass, a red handprint burning a ring around his bicep and being careful where he placed his feet. His actions showed promise, his Dad had slapped him on the back. All he needed was discipline. They could still make a man of him yet.

It was a month before she’d called, and he’d pleaded down the phone, he’d do anything, if she took him with her.

That was the last time she called.

And then it was him and Neil for a while. Most of the time it was quiet. Billy learned early that as long as he stayed out late and got out early, him and Neil would rarely cross paths. It was better when they didn’t. He spent most of his time down by the beach.

The years passed, Billy turned 13, then 14, 15, 16. His hair got longer, to the fury of Neil, and with each haircut refusal Billy would sport a new flaming bruise on his torso. He’d made new friends,

Mick, Jimmy, David, smoked his first cigarette, kissed a girl. Kissed a lot of girls. Fucked a couple too, meaningless, quick. Everything Billy did was for a release, a way to get the build up in his blood out of his body. The cigarette smoke that choked his lungs soon gave way to smooth inhales, and along with cigarettes came the *alcohol*. Billy learned to love the burn. His throat felt raw, soothed and stinging from cheap beers or stolen whiskey, and one time, Jimmy's Grandpa's smuggled vodka. He abandoned his surfboard for weights, a cheap set he'd found at a garage sale and brought home. Neil was almost proud of him. He was becoming a good, strong man, would be Neil's pride and joy if he only had a buzzcut. So Billy made sure to keep his hair long, like the guys on the vinyl covers he thumbed through at Mick's place, getting high and getting loud. Billy *liked* loud.

And then, along with time, arrived *Susan and Maxine*.

Susan was a drip. A blank canvas, delicate, careful. The opposite of Billy's mom. Max though, was a spitfire. Scowling at the sun, scraped knees and pigtails, elbowing taller kids out of the way at the arcade with her bony elbows. Billy hated that he liked her. It wasn't too bad at first, all four of them holed up in the tiny Californian apartment. Max learned to skate, after staring in awe at the tricks of the older teens down at the park. Billy drove her to choose the board, more patient than he'd ever been in his life as she carefully looked at the boards on sale. Looking up at Billy with an unspoken question in her eyes '*what do you think*' as she held the secondhand red board tentatively in front of her, though he didn't know shit about skating. He wouldn't be caught dead at those deadbeat hangouts. Still, he taught her the basics, spending afternoons sat on empty street curbs and watching her fall over, and over again, and keep getting up. He chipped in every now and again, offhand comments about fixing her stance.

'What do you know about skating?' She'd asked when he'd stomped over and told her she was gonna keep falling unless she shifted her damn feet.

'I don't.' It was an honest answer. Then again, he figured, how different is skating to surfing, right? It's all balance and shit. That's all life is. Balance.

And whilst Billy and Max were getting along from time to time, the family dinners were only becoming more awkward. There was a tension between them all, Max and Neil, *Billy* and Neil, Billy and Susan.

But Billy would bite his tongue, clean the plates, *'it's the respectful thing to do Billy, since Susan took the time to make us a meal'*, put up with them for an hour until he could escape to see Mick, chain smoking and talking shit on beach house rooftops until sunrise. As long as he crept back in through the window before Neil got up for work at 5am, he was in the clear.

Billy liked Mick. Mick introduced him to Iron Maiden, The Ramones, Black Sabbath, Judas Priest, Scorpions, Def Leppard. Mick introduced him to pot, swiped from his brothers room and inelegantly smoked by both of them on the beach. Mick was always there. He never asked why Billy sometimes hunched over when he walked, why he sometimes wore sunglasses on rainy days. He was always there with a sunny smile that sent Billy's stomach burning, and something to smoke. Yeah, Billy liked Mick.

Neil *hated* him. Hated that Billy's room was now slowly becoming a rebellious mess, bikini-clad women pasted the walls, piles of cassettes and clothes. Hated seeing glimpses of Mick and Billy driving off towards the beach. Hated the *fag* his kid was becoming, a word Billy was hearing more and more frequently.

Billy wasn't even sure at what point Mick had become such a fixture in his life. Why it was always Mick next to him during parties, why Mick hands him the first drink of the evening, why Jimmy and David would raise their eyebrows when they'd light each other's cigarettes but it all came to a head on a late August night on a rooftop.

With a light buzz of marijuana flowing through them, Billy had laughed more than he had in weeks.

'She's a snake, man,' Mick grinned, gleaming California smile wide and soft. 'Forked tongue and everything.'

'You'd know,' Billy snickered, taking a gulp of now warmed beer.

'As if you've not fucked her,' Mick laughed, swiping the bottle. Billy slapped his arm but let him take it, watching Mick slowly take a sip.

'I think half of Cali has.'

'I see, just another notch on Billy Hargrove's belt,' Mick tutted, leaning back on his elbows. 'She'll be crushed.'

'Oh I'm sure she'll *bounce* back just fine.'

The two boys exploded into laughter, loud in the quiet of the barely morning light. The laughter tapered out, and Billy sighed to the sky, leaning back to be on the same level as Mick. He stared up at the sky. If he stared hard enough, he could see the colours changing from orange to blue.

He turned to look at Mick, whose eyes were already fixed on Billy's. And then it shifted.

Something settled slowly over them, a warmth only for them, a moment that Billy had ignored, pushed down, but *somehow always knew would come*.

Mick's hands were careful. Slow. They both felt the weight of it. And Billy's fingers twitched as he reached out his own hand. The touch was light, so light that Billy was dizzy with it. Their breaths were shallow in the cold light of the morning sun, and neither of them knew who leaned in first, but the first brush of lips was *magic*. It was *new*. It was different to Cathy Turner, to April, to Mandy, to Laurie.

Billy hadn't felt this alight since the first time he caught a wave. The swooping in his stomach swirled around with anticipation, with promise, the thought of something only he, Mick, and the Californian skyline could know.

He drove fast, he drove wild, windows down and shouting at the wind of a new morning, freedom and warmth floating through him, *powering* him.

The air felt different, cleaner as he pulled up against the curb, cutting

the ignition and slamming the door shut behind him

Billy knew something was wrong when he entered the house to Max screaming and the slam of a door. Neil and Susan sat on the couch, Susan's face pursed and drawn, Neil's knuckles white against the arm rest. A red flag.

'What's going on?' Billy spoke slow but his nerves were alight, and suddenly he was 11 again, stood barefoot in silent kitchen.

'We're making a new start,' Neil said, smile too wide, too many teeth. Eyes too cruel. 'We're moving away. To Indiana.'

The warmth turned to ice, and ice to burning fire. And Billy was ablaze.

The fire fuelled him through packing up his cassettes, shoving shirts into boxes, and for the first time in a long time spending his nights holed up in his room staring at the sea until his eyes were raw. It fuelled the anger of sitting through Neil's crowing of '*at least there's no more of that faggot hanging around. Things'll be different in Hawkins Billy, no more bad influences*', Max's wide blue eyes *burning* into the side of his face as Billy sawed off a too-tough-to-chew chicken leg (courtesy of Susan) as Billy grunts out a '*no sir, yes sir, respect and responsibility sir*'.

Billy should've known. Should've known it was going too good. His knuckles dripped blood on the window seat of the now empty room, as he stared up at the moon for what would be the last time for a *long* time. He pretended the burning behind his eyes was tiredness until he pretended to believe it.

It was that fire that fuelled the end, the one last look at the house he'd grown up in, at a house where his mother once stood, at a sea he learned to swim and to surf, at a sky that only a week ago held a possibility so delicate Billy didn't dare *breathe*, as he started up the Camaro and with a screech of tires, left it all behind in his rear-view mirror.

Knuckles tightened over the steering wheel as Billy drove further

away from freedom, and when he flicked the volume button to the max, he made the promise to never believe the world could ever be anything other than *absolute shit*.

And from the ashes of California, a new Billy was born.